Interspecies Newsletter

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When Nature is Larger than Life

It is said that he who knows well how to live meets no tigers or wild buffaloes on his road, and comes out from the battleground untouched by weapons of war. For in him, a buffalo would find no butt for his horns, a tiger nothing to lay his claws upon, and a weapon of war no place to admit its point. How is this? Because there is no room for death in him.
-Lao Tzu

Gosh this is great stuff. Real Nature, real drama -Seattle Times

In October of 1988, I was invited by Greenpeace to join an effort to rescue three Grey Whales stuck in an ice hole a few miles outside the town of Barrow Alaska. Because Interspecies Communication Inc., (IC) has developed a sound system that permits humans to transmit sound and music directly to whales underwater, it was hoped that I would be able to develop some acoustic method to coax the whales out of their hole and towards the open sea again. Yet despite the obvious connection, it still took three phone calls from the Greenpeace representative in Barrow to coax me away from the balmy Fall weather of the Pacific Northwest, and up to this Eskimo village where the pre-halloween thermometer was already hovering around minus fifteen degrees fahrenheit. Simply put, I was simply not convinced that the whales ought to be saved.

There was a precedent. Two years earlier, the Russell Glacier of Southern Alaska slid down a mountainside to seal off the mouth of a fiord, trapping seals, porpoise, and who knows what other manner of unfortunate beast behind an ice barrier. In that case, I had waffled interminally before deciding not to put the resources and experience of IC to task. For one thing, nobody in command seemed to know if the animals were actually in any danger. In more general terms, when efforts to save this or that species reduce down to saving one of this or two of that, the best of motivations too easily degenerate into a case of human beings tampering with the natural order in order to fulfill their own human agenda. Yet despite my own hollow advice to let the glacier do its thing, the rescuers decided to fly north; believing as they did that sheer altruism overwhelms any inference of tampering.

Am I callous to ask what it is about human morality that insists we rally behind any activity that hints of an altruistic outcome? In that case, the incipient saviors of the Russell Glacier savored their essentially archetypal role of good guys possessed of good human know-how utilized in the good cause of aiding helpless marine mammals. Yet the rescue team also seemed to exhibit too much power and glory; a near-mythological motivation to control and turn aside a natural process of nature by exerting maximum human ingenuity and minimal sense of place. But why not? Weren't we humans guilty of massacring marine mammals to the point of extinction? By god, didn't we owe it to those icebound porpoises?

The Russell Glacier mission became a media event of the first magnitude. Jounalists from every newspaper and broadcast news network within the USA as well as from a half dozen other countries descended upon the Russell Glacier like vultures around a poached rhino on the African Veldt.

The media insists that it *reports* and never *creates* the news. But this state of affairs would also mean that Isaac

Newton was wrong when he wrote that the acceleration of a body is directly proportioned to the applied force. In the case of the Glacier rescue, Newton's equations worked out to mean that the Saviors could not easily pack up their bags and go home when they started to suspect their efforts may have been in vain. Not only was the sheer immensity of a cold damp Alaskan fiord dampening their enthusiasm; but the porpoises, themselves, were stubbornly resisting every opportunity to be corralled. But the applied force of seeing one's own image up there on the tube every day can induce the invincibility of a cocaine high. Celebrity engenders its own virtue, as it also certifies heroism. That which was perceived as the whole world offering encouragement, also overwhelmed any intuition that it may have actually been time to throw in the towel. Instead, news reporters and news makers ended up working together like a well-oiled team; artificially stimulating what might just as easily have been a natural event bound by the laws of entropy.

Unfortunately, the machinery of the news business sometimes clogs when events choose not to develop at the news' own speed. So the rescuers were coerced to implement ever more newsworthy metaphors, known in the trade as *sound-bites*, until even the project's most ardent supporters noted that the rescue had deflated into a parody of a rescue. Perhaps unfairly, that subtle shift in mood was not lost on all the articulate op-ed columnists whose job it is to analyse the tone and grist of the news. These men and women tend to pounce whenever they perceive even an atom of newsmaking insincerity. Predictably, they pounced upon the rescue operation of the Russell Glacier; never pleading accountable to the fact that they are another cog of the very same news generating machine that set the operation spinning in the first place. It was a bad moment that turned into a bad media event. Or vice versa.

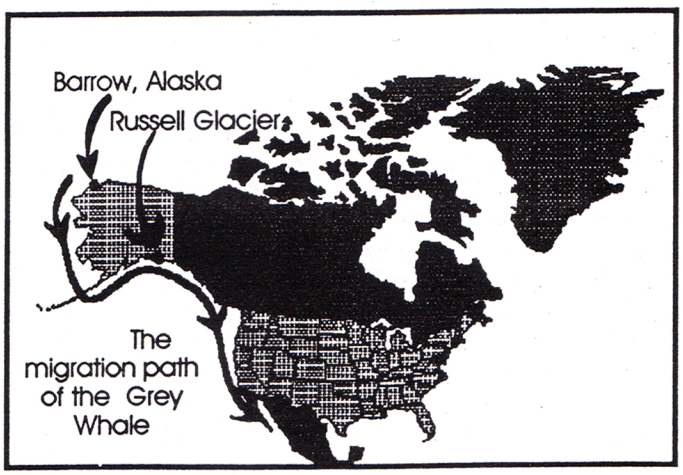
For its own part, the glacier acted very glacier-like if not also like a superhero. It receded, rescuing sea mammals, rescuers, and journalists in one fell swoop. Ironically, none of the entrapped seals or porpoises seemed very interested to take advantage of what the humans interpreted as a positive swing to the pendulum. To this day, marine mammals cavort intemperately through the waters of the Russell Fiord, seemingly oblivious to the dangers that humans insist swirl about them. In conclusion, if not also paradoxically, there is little point in faulting the intentions of the rescuers. They did what they knew best; harming nothing besides that fundamental perception of place I choose to call *spiritual ecology*.

I have described the Russell Glacier Event in some detail, because, by contrast, I did decide to bundle up my underwater sound system to join the effort to save three grey whales off of Barrow. The difference between the two events was primarily one of scale: there were exactly three (count 'em) whales trapped inside a four hundred square foot breathing hole which was just about five miles from the open ocean. Somehow, chopping a skinny channel through the fourteen inch sea ice seemed infinitely more plausible and less manic than trying to stop the advance of the Russell Glacier which was described as approaching the size of Rhode Island. So the attitude in Barrow took on the attributes of trying to solve a puzzle - what ingenious measures might Sherlock Holmes have taken in order to extricate the whales - as opposed to the Russell Glacier disposition of dressing up like don Quixote to go off and joust against nature.

Everyone in Barrow agreed that, without assistance, the three grey whales would be dead within another week. Significantly, we all construed them as *active participants* in this, their rescue. Perhaps most critical to my own participation, I realized that IC held an important piece to the puzzle. If a channel could be chopped through the ice, (and why couldn't it) then my transmitted sounds would almost certainly attract the whales *to* the channel, or evict them *from* their death hole. After all, IC has long been sponsoring projects that demonstrate one or the other response.

The ambience in Barrow was typically altruistic and sincere, to which I would also throw in a mood of local Eskimo puzzlement over how such a common occurance as marine mammals getting stuck in the local sea ice could have mushroomed into such an extravaganza. One broadcaster commented that the rescue had been snatched up as the ultimate good news foil to the superficial mudslinging of the concurrent presidential campaign. Somehow, all is not lost in an America that permits three stuck grey whales to preempt Washington politics for nearly two weeks.

Several factors underpinned the scope of this rescue. Firstly, the location was incredibly majestic. All of us: scientist, army personel, environmentalist, journalist, and Eskimo alike, seemed to pause like clockwork every few minutes, just to gaze upon a very pale sun illuminating the ice. Just as our separate jobs tended to keep us separated, so, more often, the environment bound everyone together into a single organism sharing a profound unanimity of perception. Carlos Castaneda has written volumes about the larger-than-life visioning of a don Juan who perceives human beings as eggs of light. So, after a few hours spent outside in this abominable cold, everyone of us bundled up in the prevailing beige or white parka started to look like beige or white eggs. And at the center of each of these human eggs burned an astonishing flame called body heat. Why had none of us ever detected such an inner-mounting flame before? Ultimately, the reporting about the grey whale rescue unfolded as the documentation of a mystical experience in nature translated into terms fit for the mass media.



Given the novel perception of our fellow rescuers, imagine the humbling pause each of us felt to behold the faces of three naked and bruised whales just a few inches away from our own faces. For two solid weeks the Global Village never lost eye

contact with three sentient ambassadors representing the mysterious tribe of great whales. If there is a mind in the waters after all, then here was our best chance yet to get to know it on a personal level.

When I first considered the whale's ability to survive, their metabolic virtuosity seemed nothing more than a whale's version of the same body heat just ascribed to my fellow humans. But after a single hour spent in the whale's company, what at first seemed a difference in degree transmuted into a fundamental difference in kind as well. Hadn't one whale scientist commented that, should these whales be rescued, they would not eat any food whatsoever as they spent the next *three or four months swimming 6000 miles nonstop* to the warm Mexican lagoons. Several of us concluded that Leviathan was a master alchemist who had somehow learned to stoke some significant part of his/her golden inner flame directly out of the leaden atmosphere. How did they do it? Were all the journalists forfeiting a monumental oppportunity by focusing their reportage on a mere rescue operation to the detriment of speculating about the whale's metabolism and breathing patterns? I recalled a Yupik Eskimo from Nome once describing to me a situation in which 100 beluga whales shared one small breathing hole for the duration of an entire winter. The belugas simply took turns breathing. That also meant, of course, that the whales developed complex beats to their synchronized breathing; not unlike the polyrythms of an existential big band concert stretched out to four months duration. Here in Barrow, such ideas inevitably prompted restaurant conversations about the mystical big picture of life and death. One reporter asked me how the human race would alter its course, should we all be forced to share a single breathing hole? I answered that it would turn a smaller human population into better musicians.

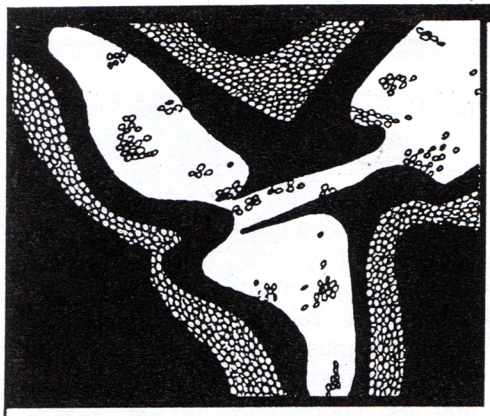
Now I stand out on the ice keeping time with my heavily mittened thumb and index finger, trying to determine if these greys employ any humanly-discernible rhythm to their breathing patterns. They have been laying on the surface for a full two minutes, breathing easily with cavernous two second-long exhalations. Then a deeper three second breath signifies a change. They dive beneath the ice, disappearing so completely out of sight and sound, and for such a long period of time, that we rescuers might just as easily forget what on earth has commandeered us onto this formless polar icecap in the first place.

My eyes wander over the theatre of this improbable rescue operation. To the south unfolds a scene out of the Viet Nam War: great chopping helicopters unloading whale soldiers, half of whom also sport the long spindly projections that, at this distance look like rifles, but which are actually camera tripods. In another direction, to the east, a three foot high escarpment of solid ice runs along the shoreline all the way out to the horizon. It is as if the last wave of a long gone summer had frozen as it curled over on itself. To the west, a white flatland of sea ice charges unbroken all the way to... where? Soviet Siberia? Finland? I blink once, twice, unable to locate even the hint of a landmark. The TV set that is my own mind decides to shut down; adamantly opposed, as it must be, to burning all the precious calories needed to conjure up a mental Mercator projection of the polar ice cap.

I clap my bulky gloves together just to make sure my hands are still inside, and rotate my body another 90°. To the north twenty eggs stand clutching chain saws along a series of newly dug channels. Yesterday, so one observer informed me, the ever-jolly Eskimoes sat by and giggled as all the imported white boys - marine biologists, oil company laborers, national guard personel - took hours and hours to cut out slabs of ice and then lift the 200 pound sections up onto the sea ice. After a full day of activity they had cut a second and then finally a third small breathing hole. So earlier this morning, the Inupiat *power* that offers local knowledge about ice, staged a quiet coup against what they must have considered to be the incompetent although well meaning *authority* of the stereotypical chain of command of US government scientists and army officers. Just seven hours into this day, and the constant buzz of the chain saws seems to dwindle further and further away as the Inupiat workers push the ice blocks *under* the main body of the ice. Just four PM, and the freshly dug channel stretches a momentous half mile from the whale's own breathing hole.

Closer to where I stand, ten more eggs hover over one of yesterday's holes that has been kept ice free overnight through the electrically-induced bubbling of one of three donated deicers. These eggs are bent over the hole as if praying to the god of whales. 'Please! You've got to teach these animals that they must, absolutely must, learn to surface at one of the new holes.' There is the rub. This cetacean act of discovery must occur within the next two hours because if the whales do not find the channel before the workers leave the scene at dusk, then the entire 1/2 mile channel will surely freeze overnight. A day's work that rivals the construction of the Great Wall of China, accomplished in vain. Yet if, by contrast, the whales *do* discover the channel, then that also means that the entire interspecies brigade of whales and chain sawyers can continue their dance tomorrow, eventually cutting a channel all the way out to the open sea, five miles offshore. The optimistic Inupiut have already started to cut out a much larger breathing hole at the end of the 1/2 mile channel, with the understanding that all three of the de-icing machines will keep *only* that single hole open overni...

...PSsssshhhhhhoooooooooo-fwaaawwww!!!!! The smallest of the three whales surfaces to startle me out of my reverie. The second whale surfaces, then the third. All of the nearby rescuers likewise emit a parenthetic groan. 'Come on you whales! Why won't you try out some other hole?' The ocean around the whales' own fifteen by fifteen foot breathing hole is barely thirty feet deep, meaning that it is no deeper than the body length of the largest of the greys. More conjecture erupts between media and rescuers: You would think they'd feel cramped. You would think they would have an ounce of curiosity to explore all the chain saw noise. For that matter, the whale blow prompts one of the more metaphysically oriented of the rescuers to ask a truly wonderful question: Where do the whales go during their three minutes underwater? One of the scientists starts to laugh. 'Go? What is that supposed to mean? Where do you think they go?' I stare at the questioner and realize that humans have been tying their minds into knots for centuries over the essentially anthropocentric issue of whether or not a tree that falls in the deep forest has actually made a noise when there is no human there to hear it. In this case, do the whales enter some cetacean version of *The Twilight Zone* when they dive under the ice?



That is certainly one way to explain the inability of these three to locate that damned channel. On the other hand, who can blame the whales for refusing to budge. They depend on this hole like nothing else in the world.

The smallest of the three whales lies on the surface, its snout battered to the very bone, its face skewed sideways to better scrutinize the human beings who also turn their heads sideways to gaze upon the meaning of life as expressed by that scanning eye. A reporter from the Australian broadcast news steps gingerly up to the southern lip of the hole, composes himself as his camera crew blocks out the setting, and then proceeds to describe the drama of a multi-million dollar rescue mission that has bogged down because of the whales unmitigated lack of curiosity. In a way, he seems to be restating the great lesson from the Russell Glacier: that nature does not operate very well on network time. While the camera eye hones into him from one direction, the baby whale examines the strange human sounds, shapes, and colors from the other. As the reporter continues to speak, a crew from the BBC queues up behind the Australian crew, and too improbably, a crew from NBC queues up behind the British crew. The Australian reporter searchs to find entirely too much pathetic irony in the fact that 'the local eskimoes who usually kill (pause) and eat (pause) whales, should be working so hard to save these three individuals.' But I am quite certain that this man has already been briefed to the fact that local eskimoes never did hunt the greys. So ten thousand years of Eskimo culture is capsulized for ten million Australian viewers through the libel of a single inaccurate sentence. To make matters worse, the reporter expresses discontentment over his own phrasing, and so repeats his lines two, three, and four more times. For my own part, I smack mittens together and feel embarrassed to watch four Inupiat whaling captains listen to this, their exposè. Meanwhile, one of the whales chooses the moment to exhale a mighty breath, spraying tinkerbelle shards of ice crystals around the commentator's head. The Aussie finally concludes his report and steps aside, making room for the British reporter.

This commentator unzips his hood, takes off his knit cap, and then displays the top six inches of a blue necktie before focusing upon another favorite side issue of the rescue effort. 'Can they justify the expense of more than a million dollars, and 100 volunteers, to save three grey whales while they permit children in the Sudan to die of starvation?' I stare at the man in outright astonishment. If body heat were dollars, then the combination of his undraped torso and his specious lofty tone would have just squandered away more precious money than the entire rescue operation.

We are the species that seeks control, both over ourselves as well as over nature. So the reporter's impossible question reprimands the ruling class of the human species, those abstract individuals whom he chooses to call *they*, for losing control by losing their cumulative heads over three foolhardy animals. This question also assumes, of course, that it is more moral, meaning traditional human-centered-logical-moral to devote the lion's share of our attention to saving the disadvantaged human underclass. Put another way, how could *they* have gone so far as to permit a mere interspecies affair to aquire a life out of all proportion to its monetary value.

In fact, the man is groveling in dollars, when he should be reveling in *myth*. According to Joseph Campbell, there are four functions to mythology. Briefly, one of them awakens the human psyche to the mystical dimension of the universe. Another converts this inscrutable mystery into a grounded order through the creation of icons and heroes. A third conducts the individual in harmony through the various passages of human life. And the last validates whatever moral system and manner of life-customs may be peculiar to the local culture.

If I am correct in naming the rescue a myth-in-the-making, then according to this definition, it must validate the morality already implicit within our culture. By contrast, the reporter's question declares that, indeed, it does no such thing. But he may have gotten it all wrong because, actually, this issue was the central unifying theme chosen by op-ed mythmakers all over the planet. For example, this one from the Hartford Courant:

> *The creatures' plight stirred global sympathy...the caring doesn't compensate for any human shortcomings, but it generates hope that this element of human nature will be seen more often.*

The representative from the BBC asks the question about why they, meaning he and you and I, are not directing our energy to save the starving children of the Sudan? I might offer one mythic answer: just as the media has invented the myth of a grey whale rescue mounted from the far northern antipodes of the planet, so that myth now encourages the media to focus some of its archetypal juice upon other sympathetic issues. For example, the one about starving children. Sympathy is like any other form of energy: it can neither be created nor destroyed, just transformed. So a reporter's commentary about the one issue highlights the other. The myth reproduces itself. The question is the answer.

But any conclusion that blurs the edges between news and newsmakers, causes from effects, not to mention myth from real life, too easily gets construed as cold dispassion. So just last night at Pepe's, 'the world's most northernmost Mexican restaurant', a dinner companion listened to my point about quanta of sympathy that is neither created nor destroyed; only to pronounce me a basket case of sarcasm. I reacted by steering the conversation into less mythical territory. But within the next hour it was revealed how marine mammals get stuck in the ice around Barrow every single winter. Ironically, if there were no predictable Arctic larder of frozen critters, the threatened Polar bears would have a very difficult time making it through the winter. Did that mean, I asked, that we end up killing polar bears when we save grey whales? Everyone at the table reacted with that mixture of sighs and laughter that means no one has the answer. An hour later, the conversation drifted back to the relationship between the news media and the rescue effort. The same dinner companion who had earlier chastised me now explained

in some detail how the rescue operation was born after a local reporter had written up the story in the local paper because the whale hole was located so close to town and everyone wanted to witness it firsthand. This led to a story in the Anchorage paper, leading to a syndicated story by UPI, leading to the networks, so on, so forth around the world. As syndicated columnist, James Kilpatrick finally described it:

The story had taken on the kind of irresistable momentum that defies objective analysis.

And in Barrow, what had started out as a typical life and death drama enacted between living beings and the elements, grew and divided, acquired an identity of its own, grew and divided again, finally transmuting into an event that prompted Ronald Reagan to call and offer the US Army to help save the whales. This precipitated what Joseph Campbell calls the conversion of the inscrutable mystery into a grounded order through the creation of icons and heroes. So we would hear over and over again about the grounded order as represented by *the unlikely combination* of oil companies, the US army, Greenpeace, and Eskimoes joined together in common cause. Yet if this was the high ground of an unfolding myth, then it also was bound to acquire its dark side, as represented by this statement from the Seattle Times:

Standard Oil of Alaska couldn't buy this kind of front page, network news positive publicity for four times the ($500,000) amount. Oil companies have battled a land raper image since the first oil pipeline was proposed...What is warmer or fuzzier for Big Oil than saving three whales?

That, should anyone need reminding, is sarcasm. It is spoken with the voice of someone who never made it out onto the ice, where every one of us got stripped of whatever *job* we may hold in the real world, to become initiated into a mindset where human beings are primarily eggs of heat. Nor is it great news to learn that there is always someone within the infrastructure of big business who schemes up gestures of public relations. So that individual must always find his clone observing the world through the magnifying glass of any major newspaper.

But enough about sarcasm. Let me focus attention, not on the faraway non sequitur of starving children, but, rather, on the linear issue of saving *all the whales*. As I sat at the restaurant enjoying a plate of enchiladas, the Japanese, the Icelandics, and the Norwegians were out on the high seas killing whales under a dubious loophole known as *scientific whaling*. Back in the early 1970's, The US Congress passed a farsighted law called the Pelly amendment that demanded, among other provisos, that the US Government impose trade sanctions against any country that disregards international whaling accords. It seemed the height of irony, although not untypical, that the same president who last week sent the army into Barrow, also refused to uphold the Pelly Amendment. When I arrived in Barrow yesterday with that information well in tow, I found myself politicising the answer to the stock question about why I had joined the rescue: 'I hope that the focus accorded these three whales brings attention to the fact that the administration in Washington is encouraging the killing of whales and breaking its own law by not imposing trade sanctions against the Japanese.'

Gorilla Boredom

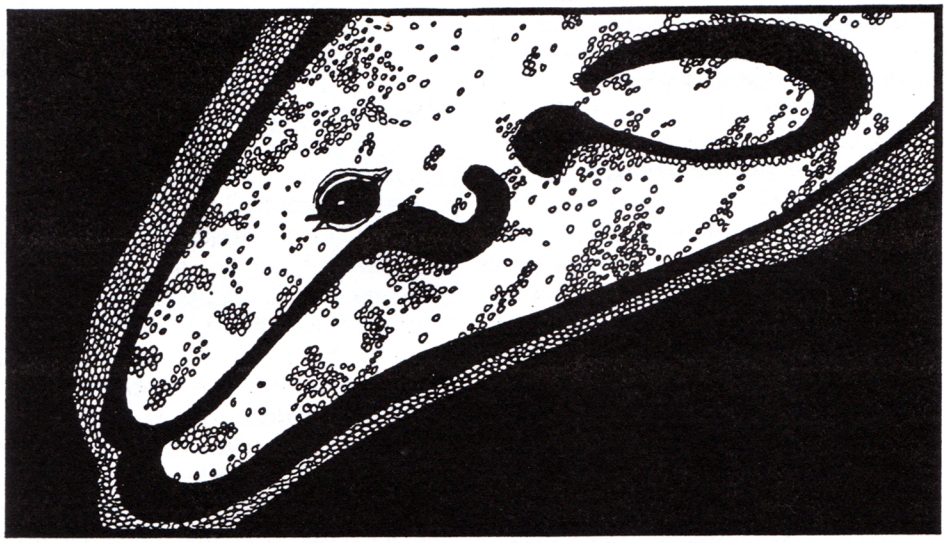
Speaking of media, some zoos, including New York's Bronx Zoo, put TV sets in gorilla's cages to relieve their boredom. A survey reports that these TV-watching gorillas prefer love scenes, wright-lifting, and auto-racing to any other programs.

But that was yesterday. Now that I have passed through my initiation by spending time out on the ice, the urgency of the Pelly Amendment seems like a faraway memory from early childhood. Out on the ice, you enter another world. All I can think about is moving whales. All I can feel is body heat.

The 2:00 helicopter back to Barrow has carried away almost all of the news reporters. There is a reason for this, called a deadline. All the stories about today's activities have to be written up and sent off via modem or satellite to make it into tonight's newspapers or telecast. Viewed from a certain media perspective, anything that occurs out here *after* 2:00, will never even have happened for millions and millions of people. Although this fact prompted no more than a giggle when it was explained to me at Pepe's last night, now that I am actually out on the ice about to commence my own job, I feel strangely liberated. I stare off to the North where the well-coordinated team of Inupiat whaling captains continues to slice hole after hole through the ice, neither concerned nor abated by the lapse in coverage. Off to the southsouthwest, bright rainbows of ice, called *sundogs*, have precipitated on either side of the sun. All my beliefs about media events seem to slide off my heavy shoulders and sink into oblivion. It is time to go to work.

The engineer who built IC's electronic underwater sound system recommended that I try to keep it above zero degrees fahrenheit if at all possible. So the scientists in charge have set up a heated 3 by 8 shed-on-runners at the fourth ice hole moving north, and located about 100 yards from the whale's own. This particular hole should be an easy underwater jaunt for even the most battered of whales. Most importantly, this particular hole is the gateway to the half mile-long channel. If the whales decide to join me, then they will also discover the channel. Everyone of us involved in this task hopes that the discovery will prompt the whales to zoom down the channel's entire length searching for an outlet to the ocean. At the end of the channel they will find, instead of the ocean, a very large hole kept ice-free by all three of the de-icing machines. Then, the entire day's worth of channel can be allowed to freeze overnight. And of course, tomorrow the Eskimoes will start the entire process again. By that time, all of us would like to believe that the whales will have gotten the general idea. If not, then I'll play again. I drop the underwater speaker and the hydrophone into the hole, tie them off to one of the sled runners, and step inside my 35° fahrenheit nest where I start connecting the electronic leads into both a power amplifier and a tape recorder. I have chosen to commence this acoustic experiment on a positive note; trying to *attract* the whales *away from* their own certain death trap hole and *to* the source of the sound.

Yesterday, when I told the various scientists in charge that I had spent part of the past fifteen years developing guitar techniques 'for attracting or repelling the whales', all the assembled men and women looked at one another as if I had said I was from the Pleiades. I explained that *live sound* has enjoyed a long his-



tory of attracting whales, because the ever playful whales, tend to play with the call-and-response medium of improvizational music. Live sounds, even electronically generated live sounds, may even lead to that paradigm-shifting phenomena known as the interspecies dialogue. In this specific case, if the trapped whales feel that their own rhythmically-based grunts have been answered, they may actually search out the source of that sound. One man wryly asked if he could bring his flute along, which got a chuckle. Someone else asked if I had brought any recorded sounds? 'Well, yes, now that you ask, my preferred choice for recorded sounds is a cassette of the South African a capella group, *Ladysmith Black Mombazo*, because their music consists of whispering voices singing in harmony. And without any sharp edges either.'

Instead, my ever-diplomatic sponsor from Greenpeace recommended that I first transmit a recording of grey whales made in Baja and recorded by a very senior scientist from the National Marine Fisheries Service. 'Yes,' they all agreed, 'let's try the grey whale tape first. Maybe *our* greys will be tricked into believing that there are other whales nearby.' 'Well no,' I answered in my most expert voice. 'My own experience makes me believe that the whales will probably respond more to a live musician emulating grey whale sounds in real time, than to any dead cassette of greys. No matter who recorded it.'

But in the end, our difference of opinion offered no grounds for an argument because, In all honesty, everyone agreed that *nothing else was working.* Had I proclaimed that I would conjure up a 50,000 year old cetacean ascended master to channel the whales up the channel, the rescue leaders would have felt obligated to try that as well. In fact, here was Greenpeace invoking a guitar-playing interspecies communicator, who arrives into this nest of commando helicopters, a skycrane right out of *The Empire Strikes Back*, an 185 ton ice-breaking barge, a 7 ton ice-breaking needle, an 11 ton screw-wheeled ice-breaking pontoon vehicle, all of which cost a whole lot more and make a whole lot more noise than my little guitar. None of those machines had worked at all. By contrast, this self-proclaimed *non-expert*, matter of factly proclaims that no, it shouldn't be too difficult to get the whales out of the hole using South African Choral music. So, painlessly, two very different views about the human/nature interface achieved a conciliation that pleased everyone: play what you like, *after* you try the whale sounds.

Out on the ice, I now completed all the electronic connections to the sound system, donned a set of headphones, handed a second set to my friend from Greenpeace, and tapped on the power to give a listen to the under-ice environment. All was silent except the faraway sounds of the chain saws. In fact, the acoustic ambience under the ice attained a quietude I have never encountered in any other ocean. Next I popped the grey whale cassette into the tape recorder, flipped the play button, to be greeted by the grating cacophony of VERY LOUD STATIC. This was terrible. I turned off the tape recorder and announced that if there were any grey whale sounds on this tape, then no one, neither whale nor human, was going to hear them through such a dense wall of noise. Without another word, I plugged my soprano guitar into the transmit connector, turned up the volume to achieve maximum clarity, and started to strum a D-modal drone. I do not know what it is about the key of D major, but in my experience, more species seem to utilize its harmonies than any other scale. Jazz musician, Paul Winter, has discovered the very same thing while recording his albums with many different animals.

But after fifteen minutes spent in the key of D, and another fifteen spent in variations thereof, the whales still have not budged. I turn off the system, don all my layers of clothing, step outside, and walk over to the whales who are lollygagging on the surface. The two adults still look fairly healthy. However the baby looks more beat up and listless than ever. 'Hey, you guys, please pay attention to what I'm trying to do, will you. You've got to move out of this hole within the next hour or the channel is going to freeze overnight. Try to understand. OK. Listen, I'm going to go back and try it again.' The whales, for their own part, eyeball this babbling two-legged in their midst. I walk to the very edge of the hole, reach out a heavily-mittened hand. One of the two grown whales reaches up to nudge my hand with his/her badly bruised snout.

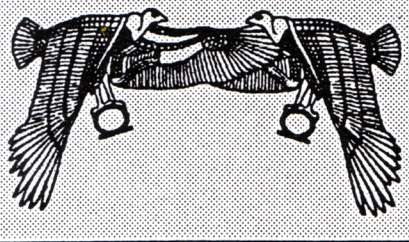
Back at the shed again, I put *Ladysmith Black Mombazo* on the box and turn it on. Whispery male harmonies fill up the icy Arctic water with a song about the struggle of living homeless under a warm South African sun. On and on they warble. But half an hour later, at 5:30 PM, with just about one more hour of daylight left, the whales still have not budged. I shut down the system, pull in all the loose wires, dress, step outside into a cold wind, trudge a half mile out to the end of the channel, walk all the way back again, trot laterally away from the rescue operation, watch the sundogs dancing across the sky, and then finally return to the shed where I flag down the first snowmobile to ask if the Eskimo driver will drag my shed over to the hole where the whales live. This is quickly accomplished. Now, just as quickly, I drop the hydrophone and underwater speaker into the water and hook up all the wires again.

Several of the Inupiat chain sawyers gather around me as if waiting for an explanation about the wires and the

Membership News

The non-profit funding world is a tenuous business at best. So IC needs to put more emphasis on attracting new members if we are to survive in a changing philanthropic climate. We have a few ideas about how to do this, and it involves some input from you. Firstly, we ask each of you to consider anyone who might like to become a member. Send us his/her name, and we'll send them a sample newsletter. Secondly, we would gladly send any of our members a few extra copies of the newsletter for private promotion and distribution. Thirdly, if any of you know of any foundations or individuals who might smile upon IC with a grant, please send any info you may have. Fourthly, if the mailing label on this newsletter has the letter 'f' above your name, that means that you receive the newsletter for free. We consider this to be one of our services as a non-profit, but also ask that you please consider contributing something, anything.

And lastly, the work of IC has received a fair amount of publicity over the past year including: 1) a description of our work in the book, *Diet for a New America* 2) a feature interview with Jim Nollman in the June *Animals' Agenda* magazine 3) Interviews and articles resulting from the grey whale rescue. This has resulted in a constant stream of requests for sample newsletters. If the mailing label on this newsletter has the letter 'p' above your name, that means that you requested a newsletter, which we then sent, but we never heard from you again. 'P' stands for potential, and so we send you one more issue before deleting your name from our list. If you resonate with our work, then please contribute what you can. We really do need your support.



guitar. When I tell them that I plan to play some a capella South African choral music into the hole, they all laugh and then one man declaims that the whales 'really gonna love that rock and roll.' I can only remind these good-natured men that at least three times during the past two days they have gone so far as to drape plastic tarps over the breathing hole in an aggressive attempt to force the whales to use an alternate hole. The whales continued to surface right into the plastic, pushed the tarp upwards until, the wind, itself, delivered it from their midst. And no, I could not be sure that the sounds would redirect the whales to the channel. Actually, that was not my intent. Rather, I wondered if the whales might make the connection between the sounds I was about to play at this hole, and the sounds I would later play when I returned to my original location. But enough talk. I stepped inside the shed, handed a pair of headphones to the Inupiat leader, and very quietly turned on *Ladsymith Black Mombazo*. The whales, for their part, immediately dove out of sight.

They resurfaced a minute later at the very hole to which I had spent the last hour trying to attract them. Too much! All the rescuers who had assembled around my little shed started to jump up and down in sheer delight. Now I turned off the tape just to see what would happen. The whales evidently took some note of the silence as well. They dove again, only to resurface back at the original hole. 'Turn the tape back on!' everyone yelled in tandem. So on it went. As if on cue, the three whales dove again. But this time they vanished for an interminable three minutes. Where did they go? Finally a keen-eyed rescuer shouted 'look!', pointing his finger a good quarter mile down the length of the channel. Yes, I saw it too, we all saw it - a blow, and then another blow. The whales had discovered the channel. Success! Hooray!!

We all hurried towards the last hole of the channel. By the time I arrived, the whales had already found their new home, had turned about, and were dashing vigorously back and forth along the channel's entire length. They seemed as invigorated by their own liberation as we obviously were. There was nothing more for me to do but return to the shed, collect up the sound system, and lug it across the ice to the main command hut to wait for a ride back to Barrow.

But then, tragedy. Someone reports that the baby whale has not been sighted for at least ten minutes. Someone else suggests that it is already too dark to be certain of anything so ephemeral as a whale spout. I try to reconstruct the chain of events. Yes, I am quite certain that the baby had surfaced with the others *after* the music had been shut off that first time. But look over there, you can see the two adults quite plainly. All eyes search the channel for a sign of a third whale. Nothing. If it *is* true, and the baby is gone, then it must have happened when the whales dove for so long. Although the baby could have rightly surfaced at any of several holes along its path, it may have, instead, tried to keep up with the two adults. Already listless, it quickly exhausted its very limited store of energy, and so drowned.

I returned home late the next day to newspaper headlines tolling the death knell of a baby whale. The headlines also noted that the two remaining whales had inexplicably left their death trap of a hole . There was no mention of the role played by *Ladysmith Black Mombazo*. Most optimistically, the whales seemed to be keeping pace with a now fortified team of chain-sawyers as they cut their way towards the open sea. Unfortunately, three days into this marathon, the diggers finally met their match at an immense pressure ridge. The sea ice had cracked, solidified, cracked again, and finally solidified to a thickness of thirty feet. But these two whales, like the hero of Lao Tzu's epigram, did not seem fated to meet any tigers or wild buffaloes they could not overcome. The Soviet military, of all candidates for white knight status, arrived in the nick of time to break a passage through the pressure ridge. So, the myth of a grey whale rescue ended on the upbeat note of a US/Soviet collaboration. The grey whales were last seen as they were also last filmed, spouting beside a Soviet Icebreaker and setting a safe passage towards the Bering Strait.

On a more personal note, I take leave of this story by assuring you, my reader, that I feel a good deal sadder and wiser from the entire affair. I too have been transformed by what Joseph Campbell calls a safe passage, in harmony, through one of the vital passages of human life. So the circle of myth completes itself. Just as we humans had to save the whales, so undoubtedly, the whales had to save us as well. -Jim Nollman